

JEFFERSON'S BIBLE IS A PAGE TOO SHORT—4**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

Appearance #7: Seven apostles saw Jesus alive by Lake Tiberius, and ate the breakfast He cooked (John 21:1-23).

Appearance #8: On a mountain in Galilee, all of the apostles again saw Jesus alive (Matthew 28:16-20). Barnes points out that Paul's reference to "then to all the apostles" (I Corinthians 15:7) possibly means that Jesus appeared often to the disciples. This makes sense because Jesus on was earth forty days after His resurrection, and the evangelists mention only about a dozen appearances, which would average only one every three days. Jesus' ministry suggests that He was not one to waste so much time and opportunity (cf. John 9:4). The Bible records the more prominent appearances, which easily substantiate the resurrection.

Appearance #9: Five hundred brethren at once saw Jesus alive (I Corinthians 15:6). This was the promises meeting in Galilee, but the exact place is unknown. Jesus had said to the women at the sepulcher, "Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Matthew 28:10). Matthew recorded, "The eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them" (28:16).

Jesus had spent the greater part of His public ministry in Galilee, and had more success making disciples there than anywhere else. It was proper and practical, therefore, that these disciples should have public confirmation of His resurrection. Many of these were still living twenty-two years later when Paul wrote I Corinthians in A.D. 55 (I Corinthians 15:6). If the testimony of five hundred could not prove the resurrection, then no number of witnesses could. And if five hundred people could be deceived, then any number could be, so it would be impossible to substantiate any simple matter of fact by the testimony of eyewitnesses.

Appearance #10: James saw His brother alive (I Corinthians 15:7). This was James the Less, Jesus' half brother, who authored the Epistle of James. The other James was dead when I Corinthians was written (Acts 12:1-2). Since this appearance is not recorded in Christ's biographies, how did Paul know of it? He was inspired of the Spirit (II Timothy 3:16). Also, after Paul's return from Arabia, he had visited James (Galatians 1:19). It is likely that Paul told him of his vision on the Damascus road, and that James then told Paul of his meeting with James.

There had been a time when Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him (Mark 3:21,31; John 7:5), but later at least two—James and Jude—did believe. Since the earthly family of Jesus was handpicked by God, it is no wonder that these men turned out to be valuable to the church. This teaches us the value of strong homes in the church. One set of dedicated parents can influence many generations for the good of the kingdom.

Appearance #11: All the apostles saw Jesus alive when He was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:4-12). None of the disciples had seen Jesus come out of the grave, but all of them saw Him leave the earth. It was not necessary to see Him arise for them to know that He was alive. It was only necessary to see the tomb empty and Him alive. However, it was necessary to see Him leave earth, because if He had just quit showing up, they might have wondered where He went.

The ascension took place at Mount Olivet (Luke 24:50-51); cf. Acts 1:2,5-7,10). If resurrection Sunday was the most exciting day of the disciples' lives, ascension day must have been the most exciting for Jesus. He who had descended so far and given up so much was not heading home, like a soldier returning across the ocean from a long and bloody war, or an astronaut shedding his spacesuit to gulp the familiar atmosphere. Home at last! Jesus' prayer at the last supper with His disciples reveals something of

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

COMMON SENSE CHRISTIANITY:
WATCH YOUR MOUTH

Text: _____

I. The _____ of the Tongue

Notes:

II. The _____ of the Tongue

Notes:

III. The _____ of the Tongue

Notes:

WHO IS GOD?

Text: _____

I. He is a _____ Being

Notes:

II. He is an _____ Being

Notes:

III. He is an _____ Being

Notes:

HOW DO YOU GO?

Three types of Christians...

- **Rowboat Christians**—have to be pushed.
- **Sailboat Christians**—always go with the wind.
- **Steamboat Christians**—make up their minds where they ought to go and go there regardless of wind and weather.

this point of view. Jesus prayed, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:4-5). Like an old man reminiscing, Jesus let His mind wander back to a time before the Milky Way and the Andromeda. He wanted to go back to the way things were before He had hands and feet, before He knew loneliness and weariness.

Jesus vanished into a cloud; the scene was empty. Still they stood and gazed, not knowing how to go on or what to do next. The disciples stood dumbfounded, like children who have lost a parent. Two angels who were sent to calm them asked the obvious question, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?” (Acts 1:11). It was time to let Jesus go; it was time to get to work telling the world what Jesus had done.

Appearance #12: The first Christian martyr, Stephen, saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55).

Appearance #13: Paul saw Jesus alive on the road to Damascus (I Corinthians 15:8; Acts 9:1-9,17; 22:1-11; 26:1-18). It was required that an apostle be a witness of the Savior’s resurrection (Luke 24:48). So Paul became qualified on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:17). Paul saw the same Lord Jesus, the same “body” which the others had seen, or else his assertion in I Corinthians 15 could not have been used as proof of the resurrection. It was not a revelation like John had, but a physical sighting of the ascended Redeemer. Since Paul says that he saw Jesus “last of all,” there have not been any further appearances of Jesus on earth (although many have been claimed).

The Extra Blessing. Jesus told Thomas, Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29). These privileged few could hardly disbelieve. Except for the five hundred fifteen witnesses, every Christian who has ever lived falls into this “blessed” category. Vance Havner was once asked to go to this Holy Land. He said, “No thanks.” When asked why, he answered, “I don’t want to go where Jesus was; I just want to stay right where He is!” Jesus is indeed “with” us (Matthew 28:20).

As a group, these appearances comprise overwhelming evidence for the resurrection—evidence that would stand up in any court of law in the world. What a pity that Thomas Jefferson missed the evidence for the greatest of all miracles.

No thanks, Mr. Jefferson, we will keep that page of the Bible.

-Allen Webster

NOT UNDER BONDAGE?

One of the most massively misunderstood chapters in the New Testament is that of I Corinthians 7 and its Divinely inspired teachings regarding marriage. Many notice a number of statements and suggestions that are seemingly in contrast to other sentiments about the same and throw their hands up in frustration believing irreconcilable differences exist and never seek to find the obvious answers. And among some of the more difficult verses in this chapter for many is verse fifteen, where Paul stated: “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.” How is it that a person could not be under bondage to a spouse without the exception of fornication (Matthew 19:9)? Does this not undermine the very foundation of marriage and the devotion that is to define it?

The Context

The reason I Corinthians 7 represents such a problem for so many people is because they are not entirely sure of the circumstances under which Paul was writing contextually. Two verses in particular give insight into why Paul wrote what he wrote. First, in the beginning of the chapter, Paul makes reference to correspondence he had previously received from these same brethren to which he is now responding: “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: it is good for a man not to touch a woman” (I Corinthians 7:1). About what had they written questioning Paul? Specifically this cannot be answered because any such correspondence was not preserved as inspired text. However, given the narrative of Paul’s response it is obvious that they wrote concerning a question they had about celibacy. But notice further that this question of celibacy must not have been about celibacy in general because there was already abundant information available regarding God’s moral law. Given the fact that they would be familiar with God’s standard moral law, but they still had some difficult question about celibacy, it must be concluded that this question was about celibacy under a specific circumstance. As one reads through the chapter, certain statements make allusion to what this specific circumstance might have been. But then we arrive at the chapter’s middle and find this statement: “I suppose therefore that this is good **for the present distress**, I say, that it is good for a man so to be” (I Corinthians 7:26). What distress might have been presently ongoing when these words were penned around the early to mid 50’s A.D.?

A brief glimpse into the turbulence that existed during this period of time in the Roman empire answers the question as to what this distress was. During the span from A.D. 50-56 a number of significant things occurred that would contribute to an understanding of this issue: (1) all Jews were expelled from the city of Rome [Acts 18:1-2], (2) the church at Corinth was established [Acts 18:8], (3) Nero succeeded Claudius as emperor of Rome, (4) Paul was arrested in Jerusalem [Acts 21:17ff], and (5) strife developed in Nero’s palace. All of this contributed to a very turbulent time for Christians in which they did not know what would befall them from one day to the next. Was it then wise to marry under such conditions? If married already how should these difficulties be handled? These were all questions apparently posed and adequately answered in this chapter in view of the present distress.

The Exposition

Among the numerous and various scenarios Paul entertains in this chapter is the case of a believer married to an unbeliever. Inherently this was not and is not sinful as implied by Paul’s answer. But he does state, given the present distress: “And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him...But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace” (I Corinthians 7:13,15). The faith of a Christian in that day and time would bring dire straits upon the family given the persecution that even then was ongoing. To two non-Christians this would not be a problem; to two Christians this would be a problem, but one they could weather together; but to a non-Christian married to a Christian, this might have been more than they wanted to endure for something in which they did not even believe. Thus in that circumstance Paul says if the unbeliever is willing to endure the persecution with their believing spouse then that marriage should obviously remain intact (vs. 13). However, verse fifteen presents the scenario where the unbeliever is unwilling to endure and basically presents an ultimatum—stay married and forsake God or remain loyal to God under which circumstance they would leave. Under such a condition and distress, by inspiration, Paul says that the Christian is not under bondage to their spouse to such an extent that they should forsake Christ to keep the marriage intact, thus they should allow the unbelieving spouse to depart. It should be noted that such a circumstance would not render either spouse the scriptural right to remarry as per Christ’s law in Matthew 19:9, but the Christian would in no way be held accountable for the dissolved marriage either. The burden would indeed be on the shoulders of the unbeliever who put that marriage bond asunder.

Conclusion

As with any difficult passage in the Bible, this passage has a specific context that is absolutely necessary to recognize in its interpretation. Contained in I Corinthians 7 is not a discrepancy in God’s marriage law, but a provision for a very difficult circumstance.

-Andy Brewer